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Jahri Zikr as Practiced by Women in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan:

The Survival of a Sufi Traditional Ritual through the Soviet Period and Its Uncertain Future

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One of the essential aspects of Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) is *zikr* (lexically, the remembrance of God), which is the devotional ritual used to aim toward reaching the mystic experience called *fanā'* (annihilation of the self in God) and *wajd* (union with God).[1] In Central Asia, there are generally two ways of performing *zikr*. One, which involves repeatedly reciting the names of God aloud, is known as *jahri zikr*. The other is to repeatedly recite the names of God silently in one's mind, or *khafi zikr*. This paper focuses on the former method, especially as performed by women.

The term *jahri zikr* requires further elucidation, because there is no consensus among scholars as to how to describe this ritual for women. Some scholars have regarded it not as *zikr* but as a local custom from old times related to Sufism, while others have treated it as *zikr*.[2] The informants in my research area—a village in the Namangan region of Uzbekistan—call it *zikr*, *zikr-suhbat*, or *jahri zikr*. For this reason, I will refer to it as *jahri zikr* here.

This paper attempts to characterize the recent (since 2007) relationship between Sufism and so-called "official Islam" [Benningsen and Lemercier-Quelquejay 1980] by focusing on the practice of *jahri zikr* by women. In addition, I seek to contribute ethnographic information on *jahri zikr* by women as it has survived through the years of Soviet anti-religious policies, thereby adding to the limited research conducted previously on Sufism in post-Soviet Uzbekistan.

This paper consists of four parts. First, I will locate my paper relative to previous research on Sufism in Central Asia and indicate the purpose of this paper. Second, I will explain the situation of Sufism and *jahri zikr* in Soviet Central Asia and post-Soviet Uzbekistan. Third, I will describe my field research at a village in the Namangan region of Uzbekistan. The concluding section will sum up my arguments.

Previous Research on Sufism in Central Asia

I have divided accessible previous research on Sufism in Soviet Central Asia and post-Soviet Uzbekistan into three categories.[3] The first is the body of work on the social and political history of Sufism and *tarīqa*, consisting mainly of historical studies.[4] I have included research on the revival of Islam and

[1] The word *Sufism*, formed by adding *Ṣūfī* in Arabic (a man in wool rags) to the suffix *–ism*, is usually described as "Islamic mysticism." However, many have objected to the use of this term to represent the phenomena known as *taṣawwuf* in the Islamic world [Akahori 2005; Chittick 1992, 2000; Ernest 1997; Schinmmel 1975; Sedgwick 2000; Tonaga 2005, 2013]. For example, Yasushi Tonaga, a leading authority on Sufism, has pointed out that *taṣawwuf* are not always related to mysticism (extraordinariness) and should be understood as encompassing aspects of ethics and popular belief. He has therefore redefined Sufism as "a three-axis framework" consisting of mysticism, ethics, and popular belief [Tonaga 2013: 17-47].

[2] For example, Bakhtiyar Babadjanov [2001a], a leading authority on Sufism in Central Asia, has regarded this ritual by women, which he observed in Kashkadarya region in Uzbekistan, not as *zikr* but as a local custom similar to *zikr*. Meanwhile, other scholars have regarded the ritual, as observed in the Andijan and Ferghana regions of Uzbekistan, as *zikr* [Ashirov 2007: 201; Sultanova 2000, 2011, 2012]. The determining criteria for whether an observed practice should be classified as *jahri zikr* will not be discussed here, because I am not equipped to resolve this issue.

[3] Pasilov and Ashirov [2007: 170] proposed a somewhat different categorization of three groups of research in this field: (1) history of Sufism and *ṭarīqa*, (2) problems associated with the relationship between a spiritual master and disciple (*murshid*), and (3) *jahri zikr*.

[4] This paper focuses only on Sufism and *ṭarīqa* in Central Asia since around the time of the Bolshevik Revolution. Works on this topic include, for example, Babadjanov [2003a, 2003b], Bennigsen and Lemercier-Quelquejay [1980], Bennigsen and Wimbush [1985],

This picture was taken at the village in Ferghana by A. Ashirov in 2004

Sufism since the late years of Gorbachev's *perestroika* around 1989 and studies of *silsila* (the genealogy between a spiritual master and a disciple) in this category. The second category includes ethnographic works on Sufism and its practices as found in the fields of ethnology, history, anthropology, sociology, and ethnomusicology.[5] The third category entails textual analysis of Sufi poetry.[6]

Among these three bodies of previous research, the first two are related to the present study. In the first group, I am particularly interested in the revival of Sufism and *tarīqa* since 1989, especially from the perspective of the relationship between Sufism, *tarīqa*, and official Islam.[7] In the second body of research, my interest lies in those that examine ritual practices among women, especially *jahri zikr* (see photo).[8]

In the first category, a series of outstanding works by Bakhtiyar Babadjanov is of great significance. In one of his works [Babadjanov 2001b], he examined how the Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Central Asia (SADUM[9]) controlled Sufism and *tarīqa* in the Soviet period, mainly by analyzing *fatwā*s (legal opinion) issued by SADUM itself. He then compared these statements to the actions of the new SADUM, that is, the Directorate of the Muslims of Uzbekistan, which assumed this role when Uzbekistan became an independent country.[10] In other works, Babadjanov [2001a, 2008b] showed that the new SADUM had not officially expressed a positive or negative attitude toward Sufism and *tarīqa*

Brill-Olcott [2007], Kawahara [2010, 2013], Komatsu [1985, 1986, 2014], Lemercier-Quelquejay [1984], Obiya [2003], Shinmen and Kawahara [2013], Демидов [1984], and Хисматулин [2001].

[5] Works in this category include, for example, Fathi [1997, 2006], Kandiyoti and Azimova [2004], Kikuta [2013], Peshkova [2014], Sultanova [2011], Tamura et al. [2009], Wazaki [2015], Абашин [2004], Аширов [2007], Бабаджанов [2008a], Сухарева [1960], and Троицкая [1928].

[6] Works of textual analysis include, for example, Гўзал [2014], Жўрабоев [2010], Ҳасан [2012], Ҳаққулов [1991], and Ҳаққул ва Хасан [2006].

[7] See, for example, Komatsu [1994, 2003], Obiya [1995, 2004], Pasilov and Ashirov [2007], Roy [2000], Sultanova [2012], Абашин [2001], and Бабаджанов [2001a, 2001b, 2008b].

[8] See, for example, Basilov [1988], Rasanayagam [2011], Snesarev [1974], Sultanova [2000, 2012], Аширов [2007], and Бабаджанов [2001a, 2008b].

[9] SADUM is the acronym for "Среднеазиатское Духовное управление мусульман," which is the Russian name for this organization. This name was later changed to "Духовное управление мусульман Средней Азии и Казахстана" (the Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan) [Бабаджанов 2001b].

[10] The name in Uzbek of this organization is "O'zbekiston Musulmonlar Idorasi." I have used the term "new SADUM" for this organization here, consistent with the usage by Dr. Babadjanov at the workshop "Islam and Gender in Central Asia: Soviet Modernization and Today's Society in Central Asia," held at the Center for Integrated Area Studies, Kyoto University, on December 26, 2016.

in post-Soviet Uzbekistan and that the relationship between the two was very sensitive. He reached this conclusion by conducting interviews with *imām*s (leader of prayer) in the new SADUM, Sufi *shaykh*s (male religious leader), and members of *tarīqa*. However, Babadjanov focused on the period up to the year 2000, and the relationship between the new SADUM and *tarīqa* (or Sufism) since then has received little attention after his works.

In the second category, Troitskaia's [1928] work and a series of outstanding studies by Razia Sultanova [2000, 2011, 2012] should be noted first because of their very rich ethnographic description. However, in general, there is little ethnographic research of any quality focused specifically on *jahri zikr* by women. Even Sultanova's latest publication is based on fieldwork only through 2004[11] [Sultanova 2012: 136], and I have not been able to access any study of *jahri zikr* by women since 2005, let alone any examination of the relationship between this practice and official Islam.

The present paper's purpose is to examine the recent relationship between Sufism (not *tarīqa*) and the new SADUM, by focusing on the practice of *jahri zikr* by women in a village in Uzbekistan[12].

Islam, Sufism, and *Tarīqa* in Soviet Central Asia

The Soviet Union was established as a secular state, based on Lenin's 1918 decree on the "separation of church and state and separation of school and church" [Szczesniak 1959: 34-35]. One feature of this separation between government and religion in the Soviet Union was the goal of not just secularizing but eradicating religion in all spheres of society [Hirooka 1997]. Following this decree establishing atheism, various legislative measures against religion were enacted. In this way, the onslaught against Islam began in the mid-1920s and continued into the 1930s.

Because of this Soviet anti-religious emphasis, many *maktab*s (elementary religious school), *madrasa*s (advanced religious school), and mosques in Central Asia were closed, and most of them were diverted to other uses such as cowsheds, workshops, and industrial warehouses [Keller 2001: 89–95; Khalid 2003: 577]. *Waqf*s (property given as endowment) belonging to the above-mentioned religious schools and mosques were confiscated by the Communist party, and the revenues from them were also diverted to education for the working masses [Keller 2001: 71; Khalid 2003: 577]. Besides, many '*ulamā*'s (scholar of Islamic law) and Sufi *shaykh*s were jailed, sent to labor camps, or killed [Khalid 2003: 577; Pasilov and Ashirov 2007: 165].

However, the entry of the Soviet Union into the Great Patriotic War (the local name of the Second World War) led to some relaxation of these strict policies against Islam [Babadjanov 2003b: 171]. The increased accommodation was intended to gain support from the local '*ulamā*'s and the general population for the war effort [Hilgers 2009: 20]. SADUM was established in Tashkent in 1943 in this historical context. Actually, SADUM was in charge of registering reopened mosques and *imām*s, the training of *imām*s [Ro'y 2000: 106–107], and controlling matters of religious dogma through *fatwā*s [Babadjanov 2003b: 172–173]. SADUM was formally an independent, self-governing organization; however, it was in fact a governmental organ, and local Muslims regarded its *fatwā*s as "the ordinary judge of the state lacking the religious meaning" [Babadjanov 2003b: 172–173]. In other words, Islam in Central Asia was guaranteed freedom of worship only to the extent that it was permitted by SADUM—that is, by the Soviet government.

[11] Among previous research on *jahri zikr* by women, Rasanayagam's work [2011] was based on fieldwork from 2004 (see page 22). This is also true of Ashirov's [2007] study, according to a private message from the author.

[12] I could not access any *fatwā*s and decisions issued by the new SADUM on the topic of the present paper.

Bennigsen and Lemercier-Quelquejay [1980] described this Soviet-tolerated Islam as "official Islam," differentiating it from "parallel Islam," which continued to exist unofficially as a potential source of protest actions against the government, mainly in the form of Sufism and *tarīqa.*[13] In the official view of the government, *tarīqa* was declared to have ended in the 1920s[14] [СИЭ 1971: 969–970]. However, *tarīqa* and the traditional customs of Sufism were not totally eradicated, as many scholars pointed out during the Soviet period.[15]

Therefore, after the Second World War, SADUM was enlisted once again by the government to participate in the struggle against the "harmful survivals" of religion [Babadjanov 2001b].[16] In response, SADUM issued various *fatwā*s and decisions criticizing traditional customs (such as Sufi rituals and the saint veneration) that the Hanafī school dominant in Central Asia had historically considered legitimate [Babadjanov 2001b]. It is clear from Babadjanov's work that some of these *fatwā*s and decisions criticized as *bid'a* (innovations) and *gafla* (distractions) anything not present in the time of Prophet Muhammad and the first four Caliphs, whom they viewed as his rightful successors. They instead relied on the theories of the Ḥanbalī school and Salafism, according to which only the *Qur'ān* and *ḥadīth* are important.[17] In general, the Sufi rituals and other traditional customs that had been considered legitimate by the Hanafī school came to be officially prohibited in Soviet Central Asia.

Babadjanov [2001b] examined in particular the *fatwā* titled "About the Incompatibility of '*Ishanism*' and '*Muridism*' with Islamic Dogma and *Sharī'a*," issued in 1952 and prepared by Ziyauddin Babakhan, who was the *muftī* (head) of SADUM at the time. This *fatwā* represented an important attack against Sufism and *tarīqa*. In it, not only the activities of the *īshān* (the spiritual master) but also the organizational structure of *tarīqa* based on the relationship between *īshān* and *murīd* (disciple) were criticized [Babadjanov 2001b]. Thus, both Sufism and *tarīqa* were officially prohibited in the Soviet period.

However, Soviet policy on Islam, Sufism, and *tarīqa* changed markedly under Gorbachev and *perestroika.* Specifically, the representative of the Soviet government declared that the worship and customs of Islam would be free and inviolate and promised a new relationship between Islam and the state at the 4th Central Asia and Kazakhstan Congress, held in Tashkent in 1989 [Komatsu 1994: 45]. Because of this formal ending of anti-Islamic policy, Islam came to be widely revived. Moreover, this change of policy also created favorable conditions for the revival of "parallel Islam"—that is, Sufism and *tarīqa* [Babadjanov 2001b].

Sufism and *Tarīqa* in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan became independent on August 31, 1991 following the breakup of the Soviet Union. It has nevertheless maintained two key aspects of the Soviet legacy of a secular state: the principle of the separation of government and religion and SADUM. The former has been reaffirmed in Article 61 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan.[18] The latter, as noted earlier, has been renamed the

[13] These terms are analytical, academic concepts that were never used by local people in Soviet Central Asia. However, they are still considered useful in analyzing Islamic societies in this region, including post-Soviet Uzbekistan, because of their effectiveness in explaining some features of these societies.

[14] *Tarīqa* (especially Naqshbandīya) was one of the biggest enemies of the rulers of the time, because it had fought against the Russians during the imperial period and against the Bolshevik government in the early years of the Soviet Union. On this point, see for example Komtatsu [1986, 2003, 2014], Obiya [1995], and Бабаджанов [2001b].

[15] See, for example, Bennigsen and Lemercier-Quelquejay [1980], Snesarev [1974], Демидов [1984], and Сухарева [1960].

[16] I received this from the author himself in a Word file via e-mail. Therefore, I have not written the quoted page of the work.

[17] Babadjanov's work [2001b] has shown that in the *fatwā*s and decisions of SADUM, for example, "*Musnad*" by Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, "*Ahkam al-ahkam*" by Taqī ad-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Taymiyya, and "*Minhaj al-muslim*" by Abū Bakr Jābir al-Jazā'iry were quoted.

[18] The article states, "Religious organizations and associations shall be separated from the state and equal before law. The state shall

Directorate of the Muslims of Uzbekistan (the new SADUM) and continues to exist today.

The new SADUM reconsidered the relationship with Sufism and *tarīqa* in the midst of the change in state ideology that followed the breakup of the Soviet Union. That is, Sufism acquired a status as the way of *Allāh* and became a component of the "Golden Heritage" (*oltin meros*) in the independent Uzbekistan. This happened because parts of the Sufi religious legacy (such as the Sufi philanthropist philosophy) became highly esteemed amidst Uzbekistan's search for a new national identity and national history [Babadjanov 2001a, 2001b]. This change of status led to a widespread revival of activities related to Sufism and *tarīqa* [Babadjanov 2001a, 2001b].

In particular, Naqshbandīya rapidly spread throughout post-Soviet Uzbekistan, as many scholars have pointed out.[19] As a result, the new government came to take some precautions regarding *tarīqa*, mainly with respect to Naqshbandīya [Babadjanov 2001a]. For example, in 1997, the new SADUM issued a *fatwā* entitled "About Some Incorrect Activities at the Time of Giving Hands to *Pīr*" [Babadjanov 2001b]. The idiom of "giving hands" (*qo'l berish*) in this *fatwā* means the initiation ritual to become a disciple of the *pīr* (the spiritual master) of Naqshbandīya. The purpose of this *fatwā* was to attempt to prohibit the relationship between a *pīr* and a disciple so Naqshbandīya would not spread further within Muslim society in Uzbekistan. However, not all Sufi rituals were prohibited by the *fatwā*s, and the decisions made by the new SADUM and their legitimacy within Islamic dogma have been frequently discussed in post-Soviet Uzbekistan [Babadjanov 2001a, 2001b]. In general, the new SADUM has not taken an official stance on *tarīqa* yet because there are opponents, supporters, and even members of *tarīqa* among the representatives of the new SADUM and because Sufism has been considered a component of the "Golden Heritage" within the new national ideology of post-Soviet Uzbekistan [Babadjanov 2001a].

Otin-oys, Sufism in the Women's World, and the State

The *otin-oy* is a female religious figure specific to Central Asia who has significant education in Islamic texts in Arabic and the classics of Central Asian literature or Sufi poetry from old Turkey[20] [Fathi 2006: 309–311; Kandiyoti and Azimova 2004: 333–334]. *Otin-oy*s have become leaders in the preservation of traditional Islamic knowledge, which has been one of the most important cultural heritages and hallmarks of Central Asia since its nations gained independence in 1991 [Sultanova 2012: 137–138, 141]. Therefore, *otin-oy*s are held in great esteem by local populations from the point of view of social life because they uphold Islamic knowledge and guard traditional rituals [Sultanova 2012: 137].

Before the emergence of the Soviet Union, the status of the *otin-oy* was legitimized by political authorities and was subordinate to Islamic law[21] [Fathi 2006: 308]. Muslim women in Central Asia led a relatively gendered social life, and they established highly developed social networks among themselves in their own *mahalla* (residential neighborhood) [Fathi 2006: 307]. An *otin-oy* was a well-educated woman from a respected family in the *mahalla* and such a woman would be invited to perform a religious ritual on the occasion of a death, *various feasts*, or women gathering to recite the *Qur'ān* and chant poems [Fathi 2006: 307]. As an example of a religious ritual held as part of a gathering of women, Troitskaia

not interfere in the activity of religious associations" [*Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan* 2014: 20].

[19] See, for example, Brill-Olcott [2007], Pasilov and Ashirov [2007], Абашин [2004], and Бабаджанов [2001a, 2001b, 2008b].

[20] An *otin-oy* is called a *bibi-khalife* among the Tajik-speaking populations in Central Asia [Fathi 2006: 303].

[21] With regard to this point, Fathi further noted, "This was reflected in the religious courts, which regulated socio-religious life in the emirate of Bukhara and the khanats of Khiva and of Kokand. Muslim religious officials represented a powerful, hierarchical class which was at the emirs' service. Most *otin-oy*s belonged to this class, but some were also from equally influential milieus such as the class of merchants or secular ruling elites. Education in this period was founded on Islamic learning, and among women was confined exclusively to those from the wealthy strata of society" [Fathi 2006: 308].

[1928] noted how the *ishān-bibi*, who was the wife of the *ishān* belonging to *Qādirīya*, performed the *jahri zikr* with four *otin-oy*s chanting Sufi poems in Tashkent during the early years of the Soviet period. Fathi [2006: 307] also noted that *otin-oy*s oversaw the religious life of women and provided the girls in the *mahalla* with two to five years of religious education in their houses at that time.

Afterwards, the status of the *otin-oy* was forcibly changed, because the Soviet authority treated their existence as illegal [Sultanova 2012: 138]. Therefore, the *otin-oy* was positioned on the outside of the official religious structure[22] [Fathi 2006: 311]. Fathi [2006: 308] explained that the sphere of activity of *otin-oy*s came to be restricted exclusively to their houses, and lessons teaching Islamic knowledge to women in the *mahalla* became sporadic in the Soviet period. The social role of *otin-oy*s changed to simply giving women advice about education, not Islamic instruction [Fathi 2006: 308]. However, *otin-oy*s preserved the religious rituals and traditions of their families, passing Islamic knowledge mainly to their own children [Fathi 2006: 308; Sultanova 2012: 138]. Importantly, the fact that *otin-oy*s were less exposed and thus less vulnerable to the Great Purge of the early Soviet period than the religiously learned men enabled them to do this [Sultanova 2012: 138]. According to Sultanova [2012: 138], Sufi poetry beyond the *Qur'ān* and *ḥadīth* also had been taught, and one of the main rules of master-disciple behavior in the *Yasavīya*, "Nobody should be respected more than the *murīd*'s master," was highly esteemed at lessons secretly given by an *otin-oy* in the 1960s.

Generally, there is little doubt that the *otin-oy*s played a crucial role in maintaining Sufi traditions throughout the Soviet period [Sultanova 2012: 138]. Today, *otin-oy*s are invited to perform various religious rituals within the *mahalla*'s social life, such as reciting the *Qur'ān* and chanting Sufi poems and other Islamic texts, and the number of women who want to study traditional religious knowledge from them has increased[23] [Sultanova 2012: 137–138]. Notably, modern *otin-oy*s are not associated with a certain kind of *tarīqa*, but with a mixture of various *tarīqa*s [Sultanova 2000: 537; 2012: 139]. Therefore, the *jahri zikr* by women in post-Soviet Uzbekistan should be understood as an *udum* (custom), not as the ritual of a particular *tarīqa.*

It is also significant that the *otin-oy*s were allowed to teach in the official Islamic educational institutions of major cities under the new SADUM's jurisdiction in 1991 [Fathi 2006: 310]. Granting the *otin-oy*s official status within the new SADUM as teachers of Islam was akin to recognizing their role in defending Islam under Soviet rule; thus, this act was viewed as a form of social recognition, and it helped to reinforce the prestige of the *otin-oy* among the ordinary Muslim population in Uzbekistan [Fathi 2006: 310]. Meanwhile, at the same time as the *otin-oy*'s status was legitimized by the new SADUM, reformist *otin-oy*s who interpreted Islam based on the *Qur'ān* and *sunna* (the practices of the Prophet Muhammad) emerged widely in Uzbek society and started openly criticizing their more traditional colleagues who affirmed and performed Sufi religious practices not based on the *Qur'ān*[24] [Fathi 2006: 305, 309–312]. As a result, the reformist *otin-oy*s, through their greater learning, gradually replaced the traditional ones in the women's *madrasa* of the new SADUM [Fathi 2006: 311]. In this dispute among religious women, the government supported the traditional *otin-oy*s and started cracking down on the reformist ones around 1995 [Fathi 2006: 311]. Thus, the religious activity of the newly emerging reformist *otin-oy*s was severely curtailed both inside and outside the institution of the new

[22] The term "official religious structure" as used here by Fathi refers to SADUM.

[23] However, there are individual differences with regard to the knowledge of Sufism, or *taṣawwuf*, possessed by the *otin-oy*s [Sultanova 2012: 138–139; Babadjanov 2001a]. Some had very little knowledge of *taṣawwuf*, whereas others knew it well.

[24] Fathi [2006: 310-311] noted that most of the reformist *otin-oy*s, who were much younger than the traditional ones, had turned to a scripturalist interpretation of Islam based on the *Qur'ān* and *sunna* in the 1980s and had studied Islam primarily in Turkey, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. On the conflict regarding the position of teacher of Islam in the official Islamic educational institutions, see Fathi [2006: 310–313].

SADUM after 1995[25] [Fathi 2006: 310].

In this context, the traditional *otin-oy*s have once again taught Islamic knowledge and the performance of various rituals to women outside the formal institutions of the new SADUM, such as in their houses or at neighborhood ritual places [Fathi 2006: 313]. The main reason for this development is the exclusion of women from the institutions of the new SADUM [Fathi 2006: 313]. For example, there are very few official Islamic educational institutions under the jurisdiction of the new SADUM in which women have taught or studied Islam[26] [Fathi 2010: 312]. Additionally, the *otin-oy*s do not hold any key positions in the new SADUM [Fathi 2006: 314]. It is certain that these factors have pushed the traditional *otin-oy*s outside the institutions of the new SADUM, as Fathi [2006: 313] has also pointed out, but they can perform their religious practices without fear of being arrested. In sum, the new SADUM, on behalf of the government of Uzbekistan, has allowed the traditional *otin-oy*s to engage in religious activity in their *mahalla*, outside the new SADUM's purview [Fathi 2006: 314].

Field Research at a Village in Namangan, Ferghana Valley

The Ferghana valley has long been the most strictly Muslim portion of Uzbekistan. At the village where I conducted my field research, a few men had participated in an initiation ritual ("giving hands") to become disciples of Ibrahim Mamatqulov (1937-2009), who was the very famous *ishān* of Naqshbandīya-Muzhaddidīya- Husaynīya in Central Asia and who had lived in a village near Kokand city. However, Islam is not as powerful amidst the local people of the village, as reflected in their lifestyle, as it is in Namangan city and the Kasansay district of the Namangan region. The village population is about 15,000 to 16,000, and it consists mainly of sedentary Uzbeks. The ethnographic data contained in this paper are based on several field research visits to the village from 2007 to the present.

Jahri Zikr by Women as a Custom

The *otin-oy*s at the village in Namangan where I conducted field research explained to me that women can practice *jahri zikr* whenever they wish to do so and that they had practiced it several times on the occasion of a death, *Ro'za hayiti* (the Festival of Breaking of the Fasting), *Qurbon hayiti* (the Festival of Sacrifice), and gatherings of women in the Soviet period. However, between 2007 and 2009, the *otin-oy*s of the village had primarily performed *jahri zikr* with women who wanted to participate in the ritual on the day of *Qurbon hayiti*, which takes place once a year. In addition, they sometimes performed it at *qada'*, one of the funeral rites, which usually begins 20 days after a person dies and continues over the course of one year. However, it is not an obligatory custom in the village for local women to practice *jahri zikr* at *qada'*. The (female) family members of the deceased, if they wish, may ask *otin-oy*s living nearby to perform it.[27] According to my field research during 2007–2009, only a few women asked them to perform this ritual at *qada'*, whereas in a neighboring village it was almost always practiced by women on that occasion. In addition, *jahri zikr* was practiced at *tasbih namazi* (collective prayer among older women on Thursday once a year, according to a local *otin-oy*) in 2009. It was not practiced by women on any other occasions in this village, as far as I know.

[25] Of course, they still exist in Uzbekistan today, but it is unquestionably very difficult for them to act vigorously in the public sphere as they did previously.

[26] There are two *madrasa*s for women in Tashkent and Bukhara (out of 12 in Uzbekistan) and one institute in Tashkent where women can study today. The history of *taṣawwuf* has been taught at the institute recently, according to a scholar in Tashkent.

[27] For example, Mehrnisa, who was born in 1939 and whose husband died in a traffic accident, asked *otin-oy*s living nearby to perform "*jahri zikr*" at her house on *qada'* in 2007.

According to a local *otin-oy*, there are two reasons why women at the village moved away from practicing *jahri zikr* as often as they had previously. First, they became afraid of engaging in the practice when Islamic reformists (*wahhabi* in the context of Central Asia) became more active after Uzbekistan gained its independence and when the government began strictly regulating religious activity in general around the late 1990s. Second, the most habitual practitioners of *jahri zikr* were older women, and some of them have died.

This paper focuses only on the *jahri zikr* conducted on the day of *Qurbon hayiti*, because this custom had become popular in the village's social life; I will reserve discussion of the other two occasions for another article. On the day of *Qurbon hayiti*, *jahri zikr* by women usually began after *Qurbon hayit namazi* (the collective prayer at the mosque, performed only by men when the sun has risen after the first prayer of the day). It took place at a location that includes the older of the two Friday mosques in the village (which is ordinarily closed), *mazār*s (tomb of Islamic saints), and a cemetery.[28] When I observed the ritual on a rainy day in December 2007, *jahri zikr* was performed in a house with two rooms on the northern edge of the mosque, where the family of a *shaykh* (here, the male keeper of the mosque) lived.[29] The total number of women who gathered there (not counting one baby) was 33: four teenagers, six in their twenties, five in their 30s, seven in their 40s, five in their 50s, and six over age 60. Three *otin-oy*s, all over 60, were in the group.

The *otin-oy*s took a *ro'mol* (traditional headscarf) and knotted it under their chins *or* just pulled it over their heads, not knotting it anywhere. The rest of the women also took a *ro'mol* in one of the above-mentioned two ways, or they knotted it behind their heads in the more popular way. The *ro'mol*s were of various colors. Three *otin-oy*s sat on the seats of honor at one end of the wider main room, younger women sat near the door of that room, and teenage girls sat with their mothers in the other, narrower room. Older women were randomly placed near the ends of both rooms. Before the ceremony, girls and younger women helped bring tea, bread, soup and *osh* (a traditional pilaf) with the mutton presented as *ehson* (voluntary alms-giving to the mosques and to society in general) and sacrificed on behalf of all comers to the mosque to all women at the house from the cooking place in front of the mosque.[30]

The *jahri zikr* ceremony began with the chief *otin-oy* reciting the 67th *sūra* (Sovereignty) of the *Qur'ān* in the main room where the *otin-oy*s sat, while the men finished *Qurbon hayit namazi* at the mosque and all the women ate the food. At the end of the recitation of the *Qur'ān, the otin-oy* said a few words praising God and the Prophet Muḥammad, wishing for the peace of the spirits of the other prophets, the Islamic saints buried in *mazārs*, and their ancestors at the village, and asking God to protect the health and peaceful life of all participants, their family, and their relatives in *du'ā'* (supplication).

Next, everyone stood up, and the younger women moved to the edge of the room or the narrower room. The twelve older women (one in her 40s and eleven in their 50s and 60s), including three *otin-oy*s, remained in the center of the main room in a circle. The chief *otin-oy* gave advice on how to practice *jahri zikr* to some newcomers and then started to sing the poetry of Aḥmad Yasavī, the eponym of Yasavīya. At the same time, another *otin-oy* started to chant the words. The third one, not chanting, practiced *jahri zikr*, leading the other participants. The first part of the chanted poetry can be found in Appendix 1. As soon as the two *otin-oy*s started to chant Aḥmad Yasavī's poetry, the chief *otin-oy* instructed participants with a hand gesture to begin their actions in the circle. Five women began

[28] Women have generally not been allowed to enter the mosque in Central Asia. While men do *Hayit namazi* at the mosque, women go to the cemetery and recite the *sūra*s of the *Qur'ān* in front of the tombs of their families, relatives, and so on. Otherwise, they recite those of the *Qur'ān* for the dead at home.

[29] According to an *otin-oy* at the village, on the day of *Qurbon hayiti* in 2006, *jahri zikr* was cancelled because of heavy snow.

[30] Women who gathered at the house of a *shaykh* tried to practice *jahri zikr* in the mosque, but finally decided to do it there because a few men were still in the mosque. An otin-oy explained to me, "It is not important where we practice *zikr.*"

turning round and round, saying "*hu*" (strongly breathing out) with the action of swinging their hands down from their chests toward the ground. After the *otin-oy*s finished chanting the words contained in Appendix 1, the chief *otin-oy* started to sing the poetry by Aḥmad Yasavī's disciple and another joined in this chant (see Appendix 2). In similar fashion, they continued on to the anonymous poetry (perhaps by Aḥmad Yasavī) in Appendix 3, which is of the anonym, and then additional poetry of Aḥmad Yasavī (Appendix 4) as the last part. At this point, all participants except the two *otin-oy*s chanting the poetry began turning around, strongly breathing out and making the same hand action described above. Impressively, some women in the audience were crying when the ritual reached this point.

When this part of the *jahri zikr* was completed, everyone sat down, expressing their gratitude to the three *otin-oy*s. Finally, the ceremony finished with the chief *otin-oy* reciting the 95th *sūra* (the Fig) of the *Qur'ān* in the main room.[31] At the end of the recitation of the *Qur'ān*, she spoke in *du'ā'* as follows: "God. The light of faith (the Prophet Muḥammad). Oh, God the Evolver, the Everlasting who gives us bread, upon thy consent, my Allah, accept the *zikr-suhbat* we made, with thy *dargāh* (court). We dedicate this *zikr* first, God, on thy own road, and finally to the pure soul of Zakarīyā, to the soul lost in this place and the souls of all in hope, for Allah. Let the *zikr* we made be praised, God, in front of God. Lastly, may Naqshbandīya, my Bahā' al-Dīn Naqshband, *pīr*—my savior—give us support and discipline us as today's protectors. Let the family members of those who made the *zikr* not go through hardships. Let their bodies and minds be in health, let them live long and have wonderfully rich lives. Give their gains the grace of God." Then, everyone expressed their gratitude again to the three *otin-oy*s again and left the *shaykh*'s house.

Some Features of the Women's *Jahri Zikr* and Its Uncertain Future

We can observe some features of the women's *jahri zikr* from this case study of the village in Namangan region. First, the poetry of Aḥmad Yasavī and his disciple was chanted by *otin-oy*s. Second, the *jahri zikr* was performed standing in a circle, generally called *zikri davron* (*zikr* of a circle). This was usually regarded as the way to perform the *zikr* of Qādirīya. Finally, Zakarīyā, from whom Aḥmad Yasavī learned how to perform *zikr* according to Babadjanov (2008b: 232), and Bahā' al-Dīn Naqshband, the eponym of Naqshbandīya, were mentioned in the final *du'ā'* by the chief *otin-oy*. Accordingly, it can be pointed out that the *jahri zikr* performed by women at the village in Namangan region was a mixture of Yasavīya, Qādirīya, and Naqshbandīya, as Sultanova also observed from case studies in Andijan [Sultanova 2012: 139].

Some comments by the women themselves as to why they practiced *jahri zikr* are noteworthy. A participant in her 50s explained, "*Zikr* makes a heart light and expiates its trespasses (*gunoh*). More people cry, don't they? It is said that it is helpful for developing good conduct (*sawab*) if we practice *zikr* where we live." A woman in her 60s said *zikr* "has gradually come to be a ritual (*rasm*) for us. It has become the custom (*urf-odat*) of Uzbeks and a heritage from our ancestors (*ota-bobo*). So we go" [to *zikr*]. I would suggest that the main reasons for the continuation of *jahri zikr* by women in the village were that this ritual touched the practitioners' hearts, and that it was recognized as a national legacy by older female villagers.

However, women's practice of *jahri zikr*, which had survived the Soviet anti-religious policy, ended in 2010, apparently because it was banned. In this regard, an *otin-oy* in the village told me, "A rumor not to do [*jahri*] *zikr* came out. So we stopped performing it, because we were afraid. We had been

[31] The *otin-oy*s there could not explain well why these two *sūra*s were recited at this *jahri zikr* ceremony, simply stating, "We learned like this from the people of former generation."

able to do it in the Soviet period. But now … .” I have not been able to confirm the official reason yet. According to one scholar in Uzbekistan, no *fatwā* banning *jahri zikr* by women (or men) has been issued by the new SADUM. In any event, some type of decision was presumably pronounced from above, because *jahri zikr* has been discontinued in not only the village in Namangan region where I conducted field research but also other areas of Uzbekistan, from 2010 to the present.

Conclusion

Although the new SADUM in Uzbekistan has endorsed the existence of official Islam, the practice of Sufism has been kept out of “official Islam” since 2010, at least in terms of the continuation of the practice of *jahri zikr* by women. This relationship between the two groups should be understood as having the potential to change again should the new SADUM—that is, the government of Uzbekistan—continue to redefine what is desirable or proper Islam. I wonder if the day will ever come when this traditional Sufi ritual, which survived the Soviet period, will again be practiced by women as part of their social life in the *mahalla*. In the meantime, I hope that this paper will contribute to the scarce ethnographic information available on *jahri zikr* as practiced by women, thereby adding to the previous research in this field.

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Appendix: Full text of the poetry chanted on the *jahri zikr* by women

1. The poetry of Aḥmad Yasavī

Antal-hodi, antal-haqq, laysal-hodi illahu ×2
Hasbi robbi jallalloh, ma fi qalbi g`ayrulloh ×2
Nur Muhammad sallolloh, la ilaha illalloh ×1
La ilaha illaloh ×2
Sanga soldim o`zumni, la ilaha illalloh ×2
Yolg`on qilma so`zumni, la ilaha illalloh ×2
Arshdin arshga uchirgil, la ilaha illalloh ×2
Gunohimni kechirgil, la illaha illalloh ×2
Sirotingdin kechirgil, la ilaha illalloh ×2
Sharobingdin ichirgil, la ilaha illalloh ×2
Jannatinga yetirgil, la ilaha illalloh ×1
Jannatingga kirgizgil, la ilaha illalloh ×1
Jamolingni ko`rsatgil, la ilaha illalloh ×2
La ilaha illalloh ×1
Doim sani ayturman, la ilaha illalloh ×2
La ilaha illalloh ×2

Thou art the Guider, thou art the Truth, none can lead us other than He (God) ×2
My Lord - shall the dignity of Allah be evermore - is all I need, my heart will erase everything else but Allah ×2
The light of Muhammad - may Allah send blessing -, there is no God but Allah ×1
There is no God but Allah ×2
I entrusted myself to thee, there is no God but Allah ×2
Never take my words as a lie, there is no God but Allah ×2
Send my words from *ʻarsh* (God's seat at the top layer of heaven) to *ʻarsh*, there is no God but Allah ×2
Forgive my trespasses, there is no God but Allah ×2
Let us cross thy *ṣirāṭ* (narrow bridge the width of a hair over the fires of hell), there is no God but Allah ×2
Let us drink thy *šarāb* (an incomparable drink in heaven), there is no God but Allah ×2

Let us reach to thy heaven, there is no God but Allah ×1
Let us enter thy heaven, there is no God but Allah ×1
Let us see thy face (its beauty), there is no God but Allah ×2
There is no God but Allah ×1
I will always mention thee, there is no God but Allah ×2
There is no God but Allah ×2

2. The poetry of Aḥmad Yasavī's disciple

Hu halqasi qurildi, ey do`stlar kelinglar ×1
Haq sufrosi yoyildi, andin ulush olinglar ×2
Hu Alloh×6
Qol ilmini o`qubon, hol ilmiga yetibon ×2
Yo`qluq ichra botibon, yorliqlardin olinglar ×2
Hu Alloh×6
Hu arrasini olibon, nafs boshiga solibon ×2
Tuni kuni toliblar, jonni qurbon qilinlar ×2
Hu Alloh×8
Halqa ichra hu denglar, ishq o`tiga yoninglar ×2
Tan jon birla toliblar, takbir boshlab aytinglar ×2
Hu-hu teyu zor ingrab, hu demaqda ma`no bor ×2
Diydoridin umidvor, rahmatidin olinglar ×2
Hu Alloh×6
Qul Xoja Ahmad qul bo`lg`on ×2
Toliblarg`a mul bo`lgon ×1
Yo`l ustida kul bolg`on, andin ibrat olinglar ×1
Hu Alloh ×6

The circle of *hu* (expiratory sound) has been made here, oh friends, come around ×1
The pedestal of the Truth is now scattered, from it take your share ×1
He is Allah ×6
Learn the wisdom of words, reach to the wisdom of silence ×2
Sink into nothing, obtain the mercy of God ×2
He is Allah ×6
Hu took a saw and expelled vicious desires ×2
Seekers, learn night and day; sacrifice your life ×2
He is Allah ×8
Say *hu* in the circle, burn yourself into the flame of love ×2
Seekers who devote your lives, say it to taking measures ×2
Growl *hu-hu*, which means a lot ×2
Pin my hope on God's profile and obtain God's gratitude ×2
He is Allah ×6
Slave Khvāja Aḥmad (Yasavī) became a slave ×2
He became *šarāb* for seekers ×1
He became ashes on the street, follow this example ×1
He is Allah ×6

3. The anonymous poetry (perhaps by Aḥmad Yasavī)

Qaydan sani toparman, jonni qurbon etarman ×2
Qurbon bo`lib ketarman, la ilaha illaloh ×1
Hu hu olloh, hu olloh ×3
Ahmad ogli Ibrohim, ishbu so`zni ko`paydi ×1
La ilaha illaloh ×3
Hu hu olloh, hu olloh ×3
Tur tog`ida turibman, qolimda tesha Olloh ×1
Chopsam qo`rqaman Olloh, chopmasam bo`lmaso ×2
"Qorongu g`org`a yo, kirgin" deydilaro ×1
Kirsam qo`rqaman Olloh, kirmasam bo`lmaso ×2
"Kafan to`nini yo, quchgin" deydilaro ×2
Kiysam qo`rqaman Olloh, kiymasam bo`lmaso ×2
"Sirot sarig`a yo, yurgin" deydilaro ×2
Yursam qo`rqaman Olloh, yurmasam bo`lmaso ×2
"Mansurni dorini qurgin" deydilar-o×2
Qursam qo`rqaman Olloh, qurmasam bo`lmaso ×2
"Oshig`larimni yo, suygin" deydilaro ×2
Suysam qo`rqaman Olloh, suymasam bo`lmaso ×2
Yurakda, do`stlar, voh ko`pdur tugunlaro ×1
Yechsam qo`rqaman Olloh, yechmasam bo`lmaso ×1

Where will I find thee, I will dedicate my life ×2
I will sacrifice myself and leave, there is no God but Allah ×1
Hu hu Allah, he is Allah ×3
Aḥmad ibn Ibrahīm repeated this word ×1
There is no God but Allah ×3
Hu hu Allah, he is Allah ×3
Standing on Mount Sinai, I have an adz in my hand, Allah ×1
I'm scared of digging (the soil), Allah! (But) I will have to dig ×2
"Go into this dark cave (of your grave)", say thou ×1
I'm scared of entering (into the cave), Allah! (But) I will have to enter ×2
"Hold a *kafan* (ceremonial robe worn after death)", say thou ×2
I'm scared of wearing (the robe), Allah! (But) I will have to wear it ×2
"Step forward to *ṣirāṭ*", say thou ×2
I'm scared of stepping into (*ṣirāṭ*), Allah! (But) I will have to step there ×2
"Weave a hanging rope for Manṣūr (al-Ḥallāğ)", say thou ×2
I'm scared of weaving (the rope), Allah! (But) I will have to weave ×2
"Adore my *oshiq*s (devotees to God, such as *Sufi*)", say thou ×2
I'm scared of adoring (them), Allah! (But) I will have to adore ×2
In my heart, my friends, ah, so many *tugun*s (wrapping cloths) ×1
I'm scared of unwrapping (*tugun*s), Allah! (But) I will have to unwrap ×1

4. The poetry of Aḥmad Yasavī

Beshak biling, bu dunyo barcha eldin o`taro ×2
Inonmagil molingga, bir kun qo`ldin ketaro ×2
Oto-ono, qarindosh, qayon ketti? Fikr qil ×1
To`rt ayog`lig cho`bin ot bir kun sanga yetaro ×2
Dunyo uchun g`am yema, Haqqdin o`zg`ani dema ×2
Kishi molini yema, sirot uzra tutaro ×2
Ahli ayol, qarindosh, hech kim bo`lmaydur yo`ldosh ×2
Mardona bo`l g`arib bosh, umring yeldek o`taro ×2
Qul Xoja Ahmad, toat qil, umring bilmom necha yil ×2
Asling bilsang, obi gil, yana gilga ketaro ×2

Learn not doubt, this world will pass everyone by ×2
Don't believe in fortune, it will likely disappear from your hands one day ×2
Where did your parents and relatives go? Think ×1
A four-legged horse in cast iron (bier) will come to you one day ×2
Don't grieve for this world, don't talk of anything but the Truth ×2
Don't deprive others of their fortune, you will be caught at *ṣirāṭ* ×2
No one, not even close family or relatives, will accompany you (on your journey) ×2
Be brave, lost people, your life will go by like the wind ×2
Slave Khvāja Aḥmad, go in allegiance (to God), no one knows for how many years you will live ×2
If you know your origin, you will be gone to water and earth, and earth again ×2

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